

Reflections on Advisory Practice in Politics

Marco Althaus

Prof. Dr. Marco Althaus ist Professor für Sozialwissenschaften an der Technischen Hochschule Wildau bei Berlin und stellvertretender Vorsitzender des Vorstands des Wildau Institute of Technology e.V.

Advice is cheap and easy. It merely relates an opinion on what to do. Public decision-makers get plenty of this every day. Some advice is “expert” expertise; most is not. Much advice is not advice but commentary, exhortation or petition. Some advice assembles facts, data and cases. Other advice says what the naked information all means. Some advice defines a problem; some recommends a course of action to solve it. Some advice offers express knowledge, some only tacit knowledge. Advice may improve reflection without transmitting concrete knowledge. Some advice says what is useful; some says what is right. Some advice is generated methodically in long purposeful sessions. It may come as endless flows of paper and PowerPoint slides, hearings and conferences. While the receiver sits in, she may receive real-time alternative advice messages via WhatsApp, SMS texting, or Facebook chat. Most advice arrives unscheduled and unrequested anyway, from colleagues, constituents, party people, citizen activists, lobbyists, journalists, mentors, friends, spouses, chauffeurs and coiffeurs. They are all informal advisers, while others have job descriptions formally designating them as such: own staff, representatives of other institutions, contract consultants or commissions and study groups.

With this bewildering pluralism of phenotypes, it is hard to say what kind of activity it really is. For example, is it art, craft, or science? Advice in politics may build on intuition, creativity, subjectivity and aesthetics like art, on skilled problem-solving and best-practice experience like craftsmanship, and on applied scientific thinking with theory-informed analytics, diagnosis, prognosis, and prescription. We may agree with Henry Mintzberg: “Put together a good deal of craft with the right touch of art alongside some use of science, and you end up with a job that is above all a *practice*.”¹

This article selects four “hot spots” to engage with. Firstly it points out that any study of advice in politics should be aware of the long tail of history. The second section focuses on the predisposition and role of advice-takers. Part three dissects some contrasts and conflicts between political and policy advisers. The fourth section looks at the increasing practice of interest-driven advocates identifying themselves as advisers.

Chronicles of Political Counsel

Right-hand aide or reputable expert, councilor of state, kitchen cabinet member, courtier or fly-in consultant : Advisers in the palace of power have always had a mystique about them. We should be aware that this has always been so. As our political civilization dawned with the world’s first city

¹ His emphasis. Mintzberg, Henry (2009). *Managing*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 10.

states of Mesopotamia, scribes recorded the kings' names and deeds – but the king's advisers, too. Earliest literature shows them “as much a part of the political structure as the king himself”, wrote RAND think-tanker Herbert Goldhamer in his legendary study, *The Adviser*.² Israeli scholar Yehezkel Dror claimed that “rulers and advisers belong to the Ur-core-components of human governance, as developed some 5,000 years ago or perhaps earlier.” He insisted that key features have not much changed since.³

Times were simple in 350 B.C. but Aristotle (who tutored Alexander) noted in *Politics*: „It is already the practice of kings to make to themselves many eyes and ears and hands and feet, for they make colleagues of those who are the friends of themselves and their governments.”⁴ Aristotle and Plato have been hailed father figures of advisory in government. In politicking and communications, perhaps that honor should better go to those they loved to hate: the Sophists. As the first traveling political consultants for hire, Sophists catalyzed the bloom of participatory democracy by teaching young politicians the skills of the game. So did the cool heads candidates turned to during election season in Rome. They gave us *Commentariolum petitionis*, the first known campaign handbook, an evergreen.⁵

“Incorporation, and inseparable conjunction, of counsel with kings” since “ancient times” was clear for Francis Bacon, who double-careered in politics and science. His 1612 essay *Of Counsel* is a savvy how-to-use-advisers memo, recommendable to any politician today.⁶ “To the person of a Commonwealth, his counsellours serve him in the place of memory, and mentall discourse”, defined Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651).⁷ “Counselors are faithful persons skilled in respect to men and affairs who supply helpful advice, and who, just as skillful sailors in stormy seas, help to guide the ship. However, they are without power, imperium and jurisdiction”, Johannes Althus wrote in *Politica* (1614).⁸ Both offer many tips in their famous treatises which certainly were not written for academic circles only. The ultimate quotable advice-adviser is, naturally, Niccoló Machiavelli. But to note, his *Prince* continued a genre already running 500 years: the *speculum principum*. None of the “mirrors of princes” authors failed to discuss advice-taking as a key task for state leaders.⁹ The reason counselors attracted so much attention was that for the early state, the setup of who was allowed to advise whom, how, and on what, was, as Wilhelm Hennis reminds us, a critical constitutional matter.¹⁰

One could march on through the centuries to fill a thick reader on occasions and nature of advice in statecraft and politics. It is a rich intellectual history if we know to read it. It relays most issues we still ponder: selection, access, trust, competence, rationality, rivalry, or problems with dominating advisers, ego-feeders and flatterers, yes-men, moralists, ideologues, influence-peddlers, power-grabbers, spies, conspirators, and cliques. We see leaders and advisers grow working relationships through trial and error. We observe patterns giving trusted advisers managerial tasks and special

² Goldhamer, Herbert (1978). *The adviser*. New York: Elsevier, p. 7.

³ Dror, Yehezkel (1987). Advising rulers. In William Plowden (ed.), *Advising the ruler* (pp. 185-215). Oxford: Blackwell. Chapter manuscript, p. 4. Retrieved from www.ippa.org.il/uploadimages/dror2.doc

⁴ Aristotle (2009). *Politics*. Internet Classics Archive. Retrieved 10 May 2013 from classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.3.three.html

⁵ For example, Cicero, Quintus Tullius (2013). *Tipps für einen erfolgreichen Wahlkampf*. Ditzingen: Reclam; (2012). *How to win an election: an ancient guide for modern politicians*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.

⁶ Bacon, Francis (1612). *Of counsel*. *The essays*. Ebook, University of Adelaide. Retrieved 20 April 2013 from <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/bacon/francis/b12e/essay20.html>

⁷ Hobbes, Thomas (2013). *Leviathan*. Project Gutenberg Ebook 3207. Retrieved 21 April 2013 from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm>

⁸ Althusius, Johannes (1995). *Politica*. [XXVII] Liberty Fund. Retrieved 2 May 2013 from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/692/194571>

⁹ Though fewer, there were “mirrors” for republicans, too; e.g. the German *Ratsmannenspiegel* for Hanseatic city councilmen.

¹⁰ Hennis, Wilhelm (2000). Rat und Beratung im modernen Staat. In Wilhelm Hennis, *Politikwissenschaft und Politisches Denken* (pp. 161-176). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 166.

missions. We get to know the difficulties of arranging advice in and from groups, through councils, cabinets, boards, general staffs, bureaucracies, as well as study commissions, institutes and academies.

As one intriguing pair of adviser and advice-taker, consider Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Carl August of Saxe-Weimar. Goethe served him for half a century. In 1775, the Duke recruited the young “rock star” of *Sturm und Drang* literature, but not merely as pet poet and maître de plaisir. Goethe was appointed to the Privy Council. It was a PR stunt if ever there was one. It caused a national scandal and serious commotion in Weimar government. The Privy Council president threw his resignation before Carl August’s feet, furious that a non-aristocrat and greenhorn enter highest state office. “Insightful men congratulate me on possessing this man,” the Duke replied, as if Goethe was property. “His intellect and genius are known. Understand that a man like this would not bear serving in state administration from the bottom up with boring and mechanical work.”¹¹ But Goethe, of course, had other pedigrees.

As a well-networked pop culture celebrity, Goethe brand-managed the cultural backwater to reputation heaven. A lawyer by training, Goethe was put on every working commission and public sector project, mining and military, poor relief, university policy, canal works and criminal justice, textile industry and tax reform. The Duke needed a high-flyer with an attitude to come down on apathetic reform resisters. But Goethe soon sang a typical consultant’s lament. Slowed down by nitty-gritty and infighting, he complained about his lack of power to implement real change. He hated court politics, elite cabals and the Duke’s getting sidetracked to risky foreign ventures. Goethe’s fantasies of creating a new political culture faded away.¹² So, even a genius adviser is just hired help, marginalized every other day. Yet all in all, Carl August and Goethe were a productive tandem. They shared a vision as compassionate-conservative policy entrepreneurs. They enjoyed each other. Goethe had no access problem. Most of today’s advisers only get “face time” on specific issues. Few of them can be a prince’s educator.

Modern advisers still cling to a heroic ideal of “speaking truth to power”. Goethe would have liked that idea. But he would be shocked by today’s hectic hustle of “speaking truths to multiple powers”: The single-person focus of advice, the two-person advising process with a single conversation gives way to multi-party conversations.¹³ Advice-giving becomes depersonalized, partly institutionalized, formalized, hierarchized, where advisers need their own advisers. Consulting factories churn out semi-customized standard services, making McKinsey look a lot like McDonald’s. A new flock of advice sources is ready to couple in loose configurations and computer clouds. Advisers also work publicly in participatory and societal consultation. They help the many counsel the many in deliberation at large. Trying to enhance democracy, they toil in variations of expert-to-politician, expert-to-society, society-to-politician, and society-to-society advice.¹⁴ The advice industry really is everywhere. Pity the poor advice-taker!

Taking Advice

Why do advice-takers take advice? They need help and know this. They match their weak spots and resources, aware of needs to perform better or to solve a problem. Public decision-makers face high stakes. They are in permanent rush to judge on complex matters, and are in serious trouble with

¹¹ Quot. and transl. from Appel, Sabine (2009). *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: ein Porträt*. Wien: Böhlau, p. 108.

¹² For a full story, see Rothe, Wolfgang (1998). *Der politische Goethe*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Krippendorff, Ekkehart (1999). *Goethe. Politik gegen den Zeitgeist*. Frankfurt: Insel; Tümmler, Hans (1976). *Goethe als Staatsmann*. Göttingen: Musterschmidt.

¹³ Radin, Beryl (2013). *Beyond Machiavelli: policy analysis reaches midlife*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 49.

¹⁴ Nullmeier, Frank & Dietz, Matthias (2011). Gesellschaftsberatung und deliberative Verfahren. *Zeitschrift für Politikberatung* 3(3-4), 307-329.

information overload. By default, the leader is “important but defective”, says Yehezkel Dror. It is a basic dialectic. Advisers “can largely be analyzed in terms of their function to counterbalance and offset the defects and limitations of their bosses.”¹⁵ The presence of advisers signals weakness, not strength. In the survival game of politics, visible vulnerability is dangerous. It takes courage to take advice. “The wisest princes need not think it any diminution to their greatness, or derogation to their sufficiency, to rely upon counsel”, states Francis Bacon encouragingly in *Of counsel*. “Nay, the majesty of kings, is rather exalted than diminished, when they are in the chair of counsel.”¹⁶

An advice-taker also has to learn how to be one. If he is lucky, he has mentors to show him, or advisers who realize they must “teach the boss how to take and to use your advice.”¹⁷ Leaders often lack a guiding idea or basic theory of advice, states Dan Ciampa. Unable to articulate needs and unsure how to turn advice into productive action, or how to create a balanced adviser network. They do not distinguish between types of advice (from strategic to personal) or advisers (e.g. technical experts, experience-offering advisers, or sounding-boards). Most people “neither prepare for nor actively take responsibility for conversations with advisers.”¹⁸ In “Rules for Rulers: The Politics of Advice,” Arnold Meltsner likens the advising process to a theatrical drama in four acts: entrance (of advisers and advice-taker), presentation (of advice), reaction (to advice), and exit (of the adviser). For each act, he deploys stage tips, e.g. “Keep the inner circle small,” “Be careful about revealing your own preferences,” “Recognize partial views including your own,” or “Avoid public protest resignations.” Meltsner cautions advice-takers to be vigilant over advisers, advice structures and channels (including leaks). He underscores that advisees should not think of their advisers as extensions of themselves.¹⁹

The best advisers will starve if an ignorant advice-taker let scheduling, office politics and inner circle games keep the gate shut. Access decisions, states Herbert Goldhamer, affect “the strength of the adviser’s influence and the likelihood that his advice will be implemented.”²⁰ Frequency of access is an issue, and timing is too. Advisers may find that their advisees are not continually open for influence. Windows of opportunity open and shut, but not randomly: The rhythm is linked to phases of the policy cycle, says Charles Snare. Different types of advisees (Snare’s ideal types are either “pragmatists” or cause-driven “crusaders”) seek different content and direction in different phases. This means advice tactics matter a lot. Finally, advisers may want to play different roles (as expert, cause champion, or troubleshooter). In sum, certain adviser types work best with certain advisees in certain situations.²¹

Openness for advice is not only a question of individual preference. Institutional design, law, tradition, culture, social milieu, and elite recruitment affect an organization’s permeability for advice. For instance, in international comparison it took management consultancies very long to crack the French government market, Denis Saint-Martin found. Bureaucratic elites denied them access to decision-making centers. He concludes that even in technical tasks, the “influence of consultants is largely determined by institutional and political processes.”²² Advice is never power-neutral, and questions of control are important. Despite substantial needs, politicians may shy away from creation of permanent advisory bodies. Why? They would rather not have experts get power

¹⁵ Dror (1987), op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁶ Bacon, Francis (1612). *Of counsel. The essays*. Ebook, University of Adelaide. Retrieved 20 April 2013 from <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/bacon/francis/b12e/essay20.html>

¹⁷ Lukaszewski, James E. (2008). *Why should the boss listen to you?* Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, p. 165.

¹⁸ Ciampa, Dan (2006). *Taking advice*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, p. ix.

¹⁹ Meltsner, Arnold (1990). *Rules for rulers: the politics of advice*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press.

²⁰ Goldhamer, op. cit., p. 88.

²¹ Snare, Charles (1996). Windows of opportunity: when and how can the policy analyst influence the policymaker during the policy process. *Policy Studies Review*, 14(3/4), 407.

²² Saint-Martin, Denis (1998). The new managerialism and the policy influence of consultants in government: an historical-institutionalist analysis of Britain, Canada and France. *Governance* 11(3), p. 348.

bastions from which they can speak out and limit politicians' maneuvering room.²³ Control issues also pertain to election campaign consulting. Europe's parties do not allow external advisers a commercial market like in North and Latin America, where many firms run a year-round business of electioneering and have replaced party functions. Europe's market overall is insufficient to sustain U.S. style business. No firm can exist by doing election work only. To avoid excessive candidate-centered campaigning, European parties keep expertise and money flows in-house and under centralized control as good as they can, and give consultants limited contracts. As far as professionalization is the right word (technology proliferation is not the same as profession-building), it has been advanced internally rather than externally.²⁴ The public affairs story in Europe is different: A cottage industry has grown outside corporatist structures.

Advice-takers may mislead their advisers. Naïve counselors may believe there really is a problem to solve; and that their brave patient will follow doctor's orders, or at least utilize advisers like consulting engineers: as evaluator and enlightening factor. But advisers may find out their only job is to stack up "ammunition" to defend positions already taken.²⁵ Instead of substance, a principal may want relief, outsourced work, legitimacy, an alibi, a scapegoat or delivery boys for unpopular messages. Hiring counsel may have the banal purpose of showing that the leader can. Buying advisers as "insignia", muses Birger Priddat, is a "performative demonstration" of disposition and budget authority.²⁶

Sometimes advice-takers limit any adviser's impact by setting up a team of rivaling advisers. At times advisory relationships fail because advisees balk at bending to adviser's preferences. They may not want to be a "homo consultabilis", i.e. be the advisee the adviser needs to perform best.²⁷ They may suspect the advisers to be useless. Many advisers "downgrade the priority they give to deciders' interests if they can afford to", says decision expert Rex Brown. They prioritize their own reputation, working styles, and intellectual pet models and methods. They ask the wrong questions, ignore knowledge available with their clients, and care too much for perfect solutions which nobody needs. They may even be happy to say: "The operation was a success but the patient died."²⁸

This critique joins a wider attack on modern professionalism, starting with the idea that the advice-taker is a "client", a term with baggage.²⁹ Austrian critic Ivan Illich once railed that "authority to define a person as client, to determine that person's need and to hand the person a prescription" is key to professionalism. Not qualifications, quality of work, or ability to tailor services to fancy make the mark. Professionals "tell you what you need and claim the power to prescribe. They not only recommend what is good, but actually ordain what is right". They claim moral and charismatic authority.³⁰ The ideal to "speak truth to power" points in this direction. So does "clinical" intention to correct politicians' bias and distortions, "debugging" and "debunking" their errors and engaging in "decision-therapeutics".³¹ It is a picture of the adviser as therapist curing the politician's bad decision

²³ Transl. Busch, Andreas (2009). Politikwissenschaft und Politikberatung. *Zeitschrift für Politikberatung* 2, 480.

²⁴ Plasser, Fritz (2009). Political consulting worldwide. In Dennis Johnson (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Political Management* (pp. 24-41). New York: Routledge, 33.

²⁵ Foster, John L. (1980). An advocate role model for policy analysis. *Policy Studies Journal* 8(6), 958-964.

²⁶ Transl. Priddat, Birger P. (2009). *Politik unter Einfluss*. Wiesbaden: VS, 83-84.

²⁷ Transl. Thiersch, Hans (1989). Homo Consultabilis: Zur Moral institutionalisierter Beratung. In Karin Böllert & Hans-Uwe Otto (eds.), *Soziale Arbeit auf der Suche nach der Zukunft* (pp. 175-193). Bielefeld: KT, 183/189..

²⁸ Brown, Rex (2005). The operation was a success but the patient died. *Interfaces* 35(6), 511-521. Retrieved 9 May 2013 from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1857991

²⁹ A "client" is a dependent, as computer users know. Ancient Rome's patronage system defined mutual obligations between patron and client. A patron supported or represented a client's interests in a court of law, in public or business, in return for loyalty and services. The patron usually had a higher social standing. It was not a relationship of equals.

³⁰ Illich, Ivan (1977). Disabling professions. In Ivan Illich (ed.), *Disabling professions* (p. 17-19). London: Boyars.

³¹ Dror, Yehezkel (1984). Policy analysis for advising rulers. In Rolfe Tomlinson & Istvan Kiss (eds.), *Rethinking the process of operational research and systems analysis* (pp. 79-123). Oxford: Pergamon Press, 99.

habits. One consternation for the rationalist is the common “gut” decider. This politician type may flee from analytics, act on down-home common sense, or bureaucratic autopilot. Maybe he is a cynic. Franz Walter opines on strategy: “Politicians and commentators love murmuring about “strategy” but hardly anywhere do things happen with such modest strategic outlook as in politics, except maybe in election campaigns. [...] Politicians rely on their intuition, their instinct for dangers, their sense for the possible. They act as situationists, they do not think like conceptualists.”³²

Policy-makers are less the strategic actors theory assumes them to be. Rhetoric aside, most politics is strategy-poor. The shrewdest politicians are quickly overtaken by anything but tactics. Scholarship emphasizes that, more than ever, strategy must be wrested and extracted from politics; there is no natural tendency, no guaranteed room, no reserved time and resources for strategy.³³ It lacks support. It demands more effort than politicians are willing to invest. Politicians frustrated with the challenges even jettison their strategy advisers in favor of tacticians, complains consultant Michael Spreng: “Politicians are the enemy of strategy [...] [They] become unpredictable for their advisers [...] Advice must fail. These politicians will then find new advisers. The caregivers in their entourage will change. Advisers will rise up who present daily opportunistic behavior as thoughtful strategy, and give the politician a new feeling of security.”³⁴

Strategy-making is hard because it yields more ambiguity, counter-intuitive information, and overload. It hardly alleviates pressure off legal, bureaucratic, social or cultural precedent. Principals may fall back to intuition to simplify. They then look at one decision at a time and avoid dissonance. A rush to make policy with limited information may, of course, be better than procrastination by endless advice-taking. Cognitive psychology shows us a world of bounded rationality and satisficing, which makes perfect sense for practical politicians. Even the great Henry Kissinger had to learn a lesson from a president who told him, he “must know when to stop taking advice.”³⁵

Adviser Types: Hacks and Wonks

Every tongue in Europe knows the word family of the Greek *polis*. But only English semantics sit on a three-legged stool for public decision-making: politics, policy, and polity.³⁶ The demarcation allows the English to slap a directive label on advice types: political or policy.³⁷ In English, we can converse on “politics of policy advice”. By contrast, a pun gets lost in translation when German scholar Rainer Schützeichel writes, “Politikberatung ist eine politische Angelegenheit”.³⁸ Policy advice is a political affair, he meant, not that political advice is a matter of policy (although that might also be true).

Political matters are “socially defined as involving decisions where all those who are understood to be directly affected by the outcome are granted rights to influence the decision directly,”

³² Transl. Walter, Franz (2011). Der Gebrauch der Wissenschaft durch die Parteien. In Margret Kraul & Peter-Tobias Stoll (eds.), *Wissenschaftliche Politikberatung* (pp. 163-176). Göttingen: Wallstein, 171.

³³ In Germany, a welcome debate has been stirred Joachim Raschke and Ralf Tils (2011). *Politik braucht Strategie*. Frankfurt: Campus; (2010)(eds.), *Strategie in der Politikwissenschaft*. Wiesbaden: VS; (2007). *Politische Strategie*. Wiesbaden: VS.

³⁴ Transl. Spreng, Michael (2008). Der größte Feind der Strategie. *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen* 21(1), 69.

³⁵ Kissinger, Henry (1994). *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 425.

³⁶ It has been proposed that different historical experiences of what the “state” is and how it regulates (polices) the people through policies may explain the linguistic split in Europe. Heidenheimer, Arnold J. (1986, Dec.). Politics, policy and policy as concepts in English and continental languages: an attempt to explain divergences. *The Review of Politics* 48(1), 6.

³⁷ German *Zeitschrift für Politikberatung* has an English co-title which reads, *Journal for Political Consulting and Policy Advice* showing it covers both areas. It does not mention “polity advice”, perhaps because it does not seem to be a real discipline.

³⁸ Schützeichel, Rainer (2008). Beratung, Politikberatung, wissenschaftliche Politikberatung. In Stephan Bröchler & Rainer Schützeichel (eds.). *Politikberatung* (pp. 5-32). Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius UTB, 22.

sociolinguist Rolf Kjolseth states. But a policy matter requires the involved people to be “certified as specially qualified”, by training or office. The two terms legitimize different paths of distributing power: “‘politics’ opens the door to participation by a wide range of persons and interest groups, [...] ‘policy’ withdraws the matter to a narrow range of known and predictable experts [...] When an issue is raised in society, the first (and often most momentous) move is the one which defines it as ‘policy’ or ‘politics,’ for once done, the rules of the game, including who can play, are set. Politics runs by popular democratic rules; policy follows elite, technocratic rules.”³⁹

Politics is inclusive, policy exclusive. It is populist democrats vs. elite expertocrats – a rivalry for power combined with a cultural clash, battled out among the groups of advisers. It is a trouble spot for any public decision-maker because he needs both types. Many words have been lost on wars between appointed staff and career civil servants, contrasts between scientific and non-scientific advice, or the melees of jurists and non-legal counselors. But the battle royal may be the one of “political hacks” and “policy wonks”. In U.S. parlance, they are the two basic tribes of any capital city, asserts White House adviser Bruce Reed. “Hacks” know and influence what citizens have on their minds as problems, while “wonks” take to actually solving the problems. There is no “upstairs-downstairs divide, where wonks make all the decisions and hacks get to spin them.” Both fight for dominance, not just in the executive. All legislators try to look like wonks, but often get elected as hacks. Campaigns and consulting firms are “hack havens,” think tanks are “wink ghettos”. Some journalists are wonks, most hacks; bloggers tend to be wonks masking as hacks; “lobbyists are hacks who make money pretending to be wonks.”⁴⁰

A stereotypical political hack has no convictions and ideology only in a friend-or-foe version. She cares nothing for substantial issues but has perfect antennae for power, opinion polls, spin, show, and spoils of victory. She respects policy advisers as experts for governing detail but sneers at the naïveté and political incompetence. These geeks, nerds and eggheads do not understand the real game, unable to handle timing, bargaining, coalition-building or messaging. A key battle zone is communication, as “policy experts usually hate it when ‘flacks’ muck about in their well-tilled policy gardens. Nothing more riles an over-educated, master-degree toting, bespectacled policy wonk during a strategy meeting than some brash spin doctor chiming in, ‘Maybe we could do it another way that could get us more press.’ [...] Press secretaries are responsible for translating policy into message, and that sometimes means we must tinker with the policy product to make it saleable to the media and public.”⁴¹

This caricature from a handbook for media advisers is mean and unfair. But it is mirrored by wonk views of the conflict. One website, *policy-wonk.com*, lampoons the situation: The “Spinmeisters” fear the policy wonk and “often want to lock them away in a policy cave”, while the politicians themselves entertain a purely instrumental view of issues. They misuse policy advisers to fix image problems: “Politicians are fair-weather friends to the Policy Wonk. Sometimes when the media notices a politician is particularly vacuous, the Politician will call a meeting with some aspiring and lonely Policy Wonk and give them vague, but nevertheless meaningless, guidance (“I think something’s wrong and we should/should not do something.”) The Politician will publish a white paper (prepared by the Policy Wonk, but never carrying the Policy Wonk’s name), issue a press release, then make a speech that actually contains an iota or shard of content. The Media [...] will be amazed. But once the credibility crisis has passed, the Politician will discard the Policy Wonk like a drunken, ugly one-night stand.

The author concedes that wonks do see their ideas materialize in policy, regulation, budget or even a larger program initiative. But they can celebrate only until political people “glom onto and bastardize

³⁹ Kjolseth, Rolf (1983). Cultural politics of bilingualism. *Sociolinguistics Today*, 20(4), 47.

⁴⁰ Today, Reed is U.S. Vice President Joe Biden’s chief of staff. Reed, Bruce (2004, March). Bush’s war against wonks. *The Washington Monthly*. Retrieved 20 April 2013 from <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0403.reed.html>

⁴¹ Fitch, Bradford (2012). *Media relations handbook*. Washington: The Capitol Net, 8.

the work, turning it into something nearly unrecognizable.” Some optimists hope and pray “for the coming of the Serious Politician”, like a Messiah who chases the money changers out of the temple.
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Adversity runs deep because of different rationalities. In one classic paper on “policy politics”, Robert Behn contrasts the economics-trained adviser and her political counterpart. The former typically seeks aggregate efficiency (the largest net benefit) and tends to ignore questions of social distribution (who gets what, who pays). She shoves equity and justice issues aside because they are hard to quantify. The politico is very concerned with distribution of benefits and costs to organized constituents and interest groups. Inputs not outputs are the political person’s favorites: he sees the money spent, the jobs created, and the infrastructure built as a political advantage – whatever comes off it in the long run. The two also disagree on whether to disperse or concentrate resources (e.g. in subsidies) or whether yesterday’s “sunk costs” are relevant for today’s decision (politics: yes, economics: no).⁴³

Smart advisers adapt and incorporate political thinking when advising on policy. Smart advice-takers may guide their policy people to do exactly that. Moreover, those who govern may make advisers out of administrators: Some career civil servants who are keen on becoming one may be placed in coordination and liaison positions so they can develop what Klaus Goetz has called “political craft”, “to assess the likely political implications and ramifications of policy proposals; to consider a specific issue within the broader context of the government’s programme; to anticipate and, where necessary, influence or even manipulate the reactions of other actors in the policy-making process, notably other ministries, Parliament, subnational governments, and organized interests; and to design processes that maximize the chances for the realization of ministers’ substantive objectives [...]. The exercise of political craft requires, amongst other things, that senior officials are able to draw on personal networks of information and communication that extend beyond their own ministry [...].”⁴⁴

Not all ministerial bureaucrats can be drawn into this function, but fostering a partial politicization of the corps can create a resource advantage for the whole apparatus. “Political craft is not only important and crucial for ministers and parties, but also for ministries and policy sectors,” note Werner Jann and Sylvia Veit. “If a ministry is interested in promoting its own policies and agendas, it must also be interested in nurturing this kind of political craft among its employees and officials.” Politicians and civil service advisers then build trustful personal relationships, often sharing political views, too.⁴⁵

Jann and Veit advert to the networks of experts and stakeholders in which most public policy is made. They are forums of debate and bargaining, and have been given many names: policy subsystems, epistemic communities, issue clusters, policy whirlpools and so on. They include government actors but also interest groups, think tanks, academics and specialized media. Here policy entrepreneurs and power brokers arrange coalitions to support or obstruct policy. A policy advisers’ strength is partly dependent on standing in the networks, where much of the advice originates which top decision-makers receive. Within these policy networks, experts play their own

⁴² Sargent, John F., Jr. (2008). What is a policy wonk? *Policy-wonk.com*. Retrieved 9 March 2009 from <http://www.policywonk.com/iWeb/Site/42EAE05E-B92B-4C1F-9384-10CC87923FC7.html> [now archived]

⁴³ Behn, Robert D. (1981). Policy analysis and policy politics. *Policy Analysis* 7(2), 224-26..

⁴⁴ Goetz, Klaus H. (1999). Senior officials in the German federal administration. In Edward Page and Vincent Wright (eds.), *Bureaucratic elites in Western European states* (pp. 147-177). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 149.

⁴⁵ Jann, Werner & Veit, Sylvia (2010). Politicisation of administration or bureaucratisation of politics? *PDpVw*. 6, 19. Retrieved 11 May 2013 from <http://opus.kobv.de/ubp/volltexte/2010/4516/pdf/pdpvw06.pdf>

politics and switch roles from detached objective technician to issue or client's advocate in "a flexible combination of styles".⁴⁶

The "Advisorial Turn" of Advocacy

Certainly an effective adviser in most cases must be a well-networked, influential advocate. But is it right when a well-networked, influential advocate styles himself as adviser? The majority of people who offer "advice" to public decision-makers are advocates. Advocacy, broadly defined, means promotion of causes and interests in the public arena. Most advocates are employed or contracted by interest groups. If they directly try to influence institutional decision-making, we call them lobbyists.⁴⁷

They represent, they articulate, they petition. It is honorable, but is it advice? Quite a few practitioners and groups assert it is. They want to be seen as advisers to policy-makers and identify what they do as advisorial work – implying that following their advice is good policy (and good politics too) in an at-large public perspective. From self-promotion to media reports, from public events to research studies, advocates are increasingly counted as advisers. Their legitimacy and authority may be in doubt, but they are present and accounted for. We may speak of an "advisorial turn" of advocacy.

The critical point is, of course, not that in-house advisers or external consultants counsel organized groups, firms, or clubs. Whoever wants to hire an expert to say how politics works or how to influence policy decisions should do that. The client is clear. The more controversial notion is that the same people advise second clients, i.e. politicians or bureaucrats. Serving two masters is problematic. If it is advice, then it is in any case interested advice. Can that be bona fide, genuine advice at all?

In defense, one might simply say that advocates are advisers if politicians let them advise, i.e. if they listen to information and recommendation presented as advice. It is a free-market view of supply and demand: Anyone can be a purveyor of fine advice for those who buy. An advocate is more likely to be accepted if he presents his advice in a credible, trustworthy and rather impartial manner – if only to be allowed to call again. A second argument would be that advocates are active in interest intermediation. In a pluralist democracy, the middlemen find the paths for public problem-solving. They act as arbiters, translators and facilitators. Historically, advisers in politics have often been group liaisons and brokers. They may convey and contribute substantial policy and political knowledge. If we understand today's government practice as governance in cooperative stakeholder networks, then the role of go-betweens is easy to see. Politically, it is natural that politicians find well-resourced allies and opportunistically use what they offer. If their allies' advice is "free", all the better for them. Jörn Kruse contemplates: "Politicians will usually choose advisers who they know or assume to stand for positions which suit themselves, their parties, or associated interest groups. Good advisers are expensive. Advisers who, on behalf of interest groups, offer themselves to politicians are mostly free (because the lobby pays) and often superb experts. It is hard to decline their services when fast, compatible, and easy-to-consume advice is needed."⁴⁸

A third argument offers that often, interest groups have the best experts in their respective field, even a monopoly, and a unique advice basis of data, cases, and insight. With solid in-house research and methodologically sound evidence, their expertise and experience is difficult to match or ignore. They may have excellent relations with scientific communities, specialized offices and international

⁴⁶ Heintz, H. Theodore Jr. & Jenkins-Smith, Hank C. (1988). Advocacy coalitions and the practice of policy analysis. *Policy Sciences* 21, 263-277.

⁴⁷ In some environments, particularly U.S. federal and state regulations and tax law, there is a distinct legal separation of lobbying and advocacy. The specificity escapes everyday and political usage, however, and finds no parallel in Europe.

⁴⁸ Transl. Kruse, Jörn (2013, 20 March). Politikberater = Lobbyisten? *Carta*. Retrieved 10 May 2013 from <http://carta.info/55478/kruse-politikberatung/>

technical bodies. Associations are “expert pools” and as such “welcome policy advisers”, states Manfred Mai. He emphasizes that groups may have a pronounced identity as public policy adviser: “Associations consider themselves also as think tanks and policy advisers. The motivation of unselfish advice to serve the common weal overlaps with the essential association purpose – representing the interest. Pure expertise freed from all interest can only be a theoretical construct because it is always attached to a personal or institutional carrier [...] Expertise is a resource which policy-makers need in lawmaking, regulation and implementation. It is easily available among associations. This is their true strength as policy adviser: They can supply experts in almost any policy field to Parliament and government, and can internally resolve controversial issues in advance. [...] Internal expert controversies are kept out of public sight by associations because it would harm their image as advisers.”⁴⁹

Companies may be less inclined to present themselves as advisory bodies. But public affairs concepts and “responsible lobbying” principles can accentuate the adviser function, as may *Corporate Social Citizenship* (CSR): Through it, firms can also want to contribute to solving public problems. They may offer experts, networks, infrastructure and money, or partnerships with the state, initiatives, charities, or think tanks. The latter claim the greatest merit to be advisers because of their expert work on public policy questions. Some such policy institutes are privately-funded vehicles for certain causes and tied to organized interests. Even if not, today’s marketing-driven idea factories often take and promote positions, and then are seen to “behave much like interest groups with an advocacy posture.”⁵⁰

Some critics do get upset over what they see as a bogus claim of advice-giving. For example, Rudolf Speth warns of lobbyists cloaking themselves in the mantle of advice; he sees the term advice as a “camouflage label”, “euphemism” and “metaphor” to conceal influence-seeking. The “styling as neutral advice” is but a device to legitimize access to politicians and improve the lobbyists’ image. Yet he concedes that “in a strict sense, there is no neutral policy advice. Where it is neutral, it is ineffective”.⁵¹ Some public policy-makers find interested advice normal. It would be absurd to attempt to “sterilize politics” from such input, states one German politician, liberal Bundestag member Otto Fricke: “In the rationality [of politics], the Archimedean Point is interest. [...] In a basic sense, any advice can only be advice for something and thus pointing in one direction. A lobbyist, a conversation partner with his own or third-party interest, is not the pathological exception but the normal, healthy and necessary general case of political dialogue on every level. [...] Interested advice is not a different politics but truly constitutes it. [...] Responsibility for decisions is responsibility for selection – for decisions and for preparing decisions. These decision-decisions are legitimate and necessary.”⁵²

Perhaps politicians, since they are advocates for parties, causes, and constituents, find no fault with advocate-advisers as long as they know how to gage their interest affiliation. Possibly they also draw a simple distinction between (a) personal trusted confidants and (b) everyone else with an opinion. Thomas Hobbes would be pragmatic. He did not demand advisers to have interests. As long as they align with the principal’s, it was alright. The “first condition of a good counsellour”, the *Leviathan* goes, is “that his ends, and interest, be not inconsistent with the ends and interest of him he counselleth.” But advice should be unobtrusive and not “exhortation and dehortation”, which Hobbes defines as “counsell vehemently pressed.” Pushy advisers are “corrupt” when they leave the straight talk and start to lobby: to “make use of similitudes, metaphors, examples, and other tooles

⁴⁹ Transl. Mai, Manfred (2006). *Verbände und Politikberatung*. In Svenja Falk (eds.), *Handbuch Politikberatung* (pp. 268-274). Wiesbaden: VS, 171

⁵⁰ Radin (2013), op. cit., 39.

⁵¹ Transl. Speth, Rudolf (2004). *Politikberatung als Lobbying*. In Steffen Dagger et al. (eds.), *Politikberatung in Deutschland* (pp. 164-177). Wiesbaden: VS.

⁵² Transl. Fricke, Otto (2013, 27 Feb) *Entspannt Euch! Carta*. Retrieved 3 May 2013 from <http://carta.info/54742/entspannt-euch/>

of oratory, to persuade their hearers of the utility, honour, or justice of following their advise.”⁵³ Francis Bacon too saw a “danger of being unfaithfully counselled, and more for the good of them that counsel, than of him that is counseled.” He suggested to let advisers check advisers: “one counsellor, keepeth sentinel over another; so that if any do counsel out of faction or private ends, it commonly comes to the king's ear.” His best remedy is, “if princes know their counsellors, as well as their counsellors know them.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

The historic legacy of the adviser in politics is impressive. An honorable calling open to abuse, it has always contributed to decision-making practice for better or worse. The adviser's fate and impact depends mostly on the advisee. The advice-taker may be unprepared and amateurish using advisers. Sometimes he may not even want to consult. Thus, opportunities for adviser frustrations are plenty. One limitation for advisers' effectiveness is competition. A typical situation in politics is strong rivalry between political and policy advisers. To keep the balance between the two is a challenge. No less demanding is the question how to deal with advisers who are at the core advocates. Organized groups who put up advice have some good reasons for their aspiration. It would be unfair to say they finagled their way from petitioning lobby to more respectable advice-giver. But the idea remains controversial.

⁵³ Hobbes, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Bacon, op. cit.